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FINDING A CHILD CARE SOLUTION FOR THE SINGLE PARENT
DURING MOBILIZATION(U) AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLL
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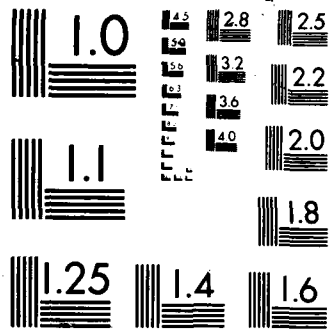
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STUDENT REPORT

FINDING A CHILD CARE SOLUTION
FOR THE SINGLE PARENT
DURING MOBILIZATION

MAJOR TERRY D. TAYLOR

87-2465

"insights into tomorrow"

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REPORT NUMBER 87-2465

TITLE FINDING A CHILD CARE SOLUTION FOR THE SINGLE
PARENT DURING MOBILIZATION

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Submitted to the faculty in partial fulfillment of
requirements for graduation.

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PREFACE

This study is conducted with the objective of improving Air Force readiness. It does this by attempting to find child care options that allow single parents to mobilize without undue concern for the well being of their children. It is hoped that while Air Force readiness is improved, the parent and child will also benefit.

This study differs from many studies on the benefits of single parents in the military. It does not try to encourage or discourage the presence of single parents in the Air Force. This study accepts the fact that single parents are in the Air Force and are trained to perform a mission. The sole aim of this study is to help them accomplish that mission. Ideally the quality of life of the single parent and child will benefit at the same time Air Force readiness is improved.

The objective of this study may be to improve Air Force readiness. But the study is dedicated to the hard working single parents who somehow find time to be Mom, Dad, cook, housekeeper, and professional airman.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Terry D. Taylor received his commission in the United States Air Force through the ROTC program at Utah State University in 1973. While there, he received a bachelor of science degree in electrical engineering.

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During this last assignment Major Taylor worked Air Force readiness issues that affect combat employment capabilities. This assignment served as a basis for the beginning of this study.

A distinguished graduate of Squadron Officer School, Major Taylor is currently a student at the Air Command and Staff College. Major Taylor has masters degrees in business management and international relations.

Major Taylor is an air power enthusiast as well as an advocate of quality child care. He and his wife, Sherry, have four children: Chrissa, Chris, Cheyenne, Megan, and one on the way.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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REPORT NUMBER 87-2465

AUTHOR(S) MAJOR TERRY D. TAYLOR, USAF

TITLE FINDING A CHILD CARE SOLUTION FOR THE SINGLE PARENT DURING MOBILIZATION

I. Purpose: To improve Air Force readiness by finding suitable child care options so single parents can mobilize on short-notice without undue concern for the welfare of their children.

II. Problem: The primary unique hardship for Air Force single parents is finding child care flexible enough to meet military commitments. Air Force leaders are concerned about the availability of some single parents in the event of mobilization. Alerts, exercises, and recalls do not necessarily measure the extent of the problem. Usually these activities are announced ahead of time and only last a short duration. An actual no-notice mobility requiring the single parent to leave the area for two or more weeks could uncover many unprepared child care plans.

III. Data: The Air Force has four programs that directly support single parent child care needs. AFR 35-59 (Dependent Care Responsibilities), AF Form 357 (Dependent Care Certification), Air Force child care centers, and Air Force family support centers all help the single parent settle child care requirements.

AFR 35-59 clearly states the Air Force position, single parent responsibilities for dependents, and legal ramifications. AF Form 357 serves two purposes. It helps both the single parent and the Air Force. It forces the single parent to predesignate

CONTINUED

someone to care for his children in the event of military commitments requiring his absence. Unfortunately data shows some single parents do not put much effort into the program. Their apathy is because they do not believe a real no-notice mobilization is likely. Data also shows that both AFR 35-59 and Form 357 suffer from lack of commander emphasis.

Air Force child care centers on base are not flexible enough for single parent child care needs during mobility. However, their family day care program where they license homes (usually military) in the area is well suited to single parent child care needs. Air Force family support centers primarily provide referral service on child care agencies in the community.

Data reveals a continued growth of single parents in the Air Force. Presently the Air Force has about 8,500 single parents with 11,500 children living with them. About 35 percent of these children are under six years old. The projected growth indicates a need to continue to find ways to solve the single parent child care needs so the Air Force mission is not hampered.

IV. Findings: AFR 35-59 is an adequate regulation, but it is not adequately enforced. The result affects Air Force readiness. Air Force Form 357 is not given adequate emphasis by commanders. Supervisors need to get more involved in verifying the form. Air Force readiness is affected by the lack of involvement. Air Force child care centers are not suitable for single parent child care during mobility, but their family day care homes are ideally suited. Air Force family support centers may be a source of information for single parents interested in civilian child care and foster home agencies.

V. Recommendations: Commanders and supervisors should more strongly enforce AFR 35-59 and AF Form 357, to include punishment for violators. Air Force child care centers should be used in a campaign to inform single parents of the importance of their child care plan in the event of mobilization. Child care centers should advertise the suitability of their family day care program for single parents. All bases should implement family day care programs. Family support centers should continue to build a strong file of child care support agencies in the community.

Chapter One

THE PROBLEM IS CHILD CARE, NOT SINGLE PARENTS

"Being a child is in itself a profession."

Mark Twain

INTRODUCTION

Mark Twain would probably agree that taking care of a child is also a profession. Therefore a single parent in the Air Force has two professions, parent and airman. In the event of a national emergency requiring military mobilization, which profession has priority for the single parent airman? The Air Force considers this potential conflict to be a significant problem (8:24; 9:2; 10:3; 12:3; 19:1; 20:12; 21:3; 25:1; 29:14; 31; 32; 33; 34; 35).

Problem Statement

This study addresses the problem of improving the mobility readiness of the single parent airman. It narrows the focus to child care problems that prevent the single parent from being able to mobilize. It takes this approach because child care is the major reason single parents may not be available for mobility (27:2). Therefore finding suitable child care arrangements for single parents will improve Air Force readiness.

Objective

The objective of this study is to improve Air Force readiness. This will be accomplished by helping the Air Force and the single parent find child care solutions to the conflicts between the professions of airman and parent. Suitable child care is necessary to allow the single parent to respond quickly to a no-notice mobility without undue concern for the well being of children (31). The child, the parent, and the Air Force will benefit. Quality child care is critical for children (4:3). Concern about adequate child care is a major source of guilt for single parents (11:D1). This guilt decreases the airman's productivity for the Air Force (5:1).

Method of Treatment

This study researches appropriate military regulations and documents. It examines studies made on related issues of child care and single parents. It compiles related information from newspapers, magazines, and professional publications. It also gathers information from experts on child care and single parent issues. This information is combined to analyze successes and failures of past and present Air Force programs that are designed to improve single parent response to mobility. The study also evaluates the suggestions and opinions of experts familiar with the problem. After a thorough analysis of these programs and proposals, the study recommends actions the Air Force should take.

LIMITATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Limitations

Recommendations are specifically limited to Air Force single parent child care programs rather than programs applicable to all services. This is because the organizational structures of child care programs in the services are very diverse. Army child care is tied to the Army Community Services Program (22:2). Navy child care responsibilities fall under the Navy Recreation Program (23:1). Air Force child care is placed under the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) Directorate (15:1). The organizational and philosophical differences in the services' child care programs make it difficult to produce recommendations appropriate to all services (31).

Just as the services' approaches to child care are not uniform, not all single parents have uniform child care needs. This is another limitation of the study. It does not differentiate among varying child care needs of Air Force single parents. This approach is common, however. One medical doctor specializing in needs of the military single parent family comments, "There is a tendency to equate all single parent families regardless of the complex and variable circumstances surrounding the loss of a parent . . . (4:3)." A single parent master sergeant or lieutenant colonel with a seventeen year old child has much different child care needs than a single parent senior airman with a two month old infant and a three year old. At least some of the programs analyzed in this study should be applicable to a large segment of Air Force single parents.

A third limitation to this study is that it only explores child care plans to improve single parent readiness for mobility.

It does not analyze child care options that allow single parents to be assigned to a remote tour. Although some of the recommendations may be applicable to this difficult issue, the study makes no attempt to solve the remote tour dilemma for single parents.

Assumptions

This study makes the following assumptions:

1. Air Force mission accomplishment has priority over single parent child care needs.
2. Excessive Air Force funds should not be committed to provide child care for single parents.
3. Meeting their child care needs will improve single parent contribution to the Air Force mission.
4. The all volunteer force will not be discontinued.
5. Numbers of single parents in the Air Force will continue to increase because of divorces, deaths, and more acceptance in society of male child custody.

Most of the assumptions are supported in the study. One corollary assumption is that numbers of single parents in the Air Force will not decrease. Although single parent access into the service is a current issue, this study assumes that regardless of any changes in policy, improved child care for those single parents already in the Air Force is still worth investigating. Society's trend toward more acceptance of male child custody and the increasing divorce rate appear to support this viewpoint.

THE AIR FORCE POSITION ON SINGLE PARENT RESPONSIBILITY

When the professions of single parent and airman clash which one has priority? The Air Force is very clear on its position. It requires all airmen to make arrangements so their children do not interfere with their military duties (12:2). Historically the military places accomplishment of the mission ahead of personal considerations and does not tolerate human factors that get in the way (26:29). This policy is not discriminatory toward single parents. However, our society as well as the Air Force has historically shown a lack of institutional support toward single parents (1:173). Today the all volunteer force concept requires the Air Force be more sensitive to airmen's personal needs to entice and retain volunteers (27:15). In spite of this need, Air Force regulations emphatically require single parents be available for no-notice mobility (12:1-4).

A mandatory requirement to be available for mobility does not resolve the conflict between military and parental responsibilities. In fact investigation shows that some commanders believe single parent airmen will put parental duties ahead of military commitment (20:12). This possibility concerns Air Force leaders so much that some call it " . . . potentially one of the largest problems facing the Air Force in the next decade (25:1)."

Because of this concern , many studies have investigated the single parent phenomenon in our society and in the military. Orthner, Mace, Rider, Sikes, Pelesh and others have made detailed studies on single parents. The Air Force has tasked staff study teams to write reports on the issue. Some of these reports concentrate on whether single parents are detrimental to the military. Others dwell on the psychological and sociological aspects of being a single parent. Still others evaluate single parent lifestyles and ask questions such as: Do single parents feel left out? Do they feel discriminated against? What are their goals in life? How do they hold up emotionally? Are they satisfied with their lives (16:1)? The countless studies have not altered the basic Air Force position. Single parents must meet their military obligations (12:3)!

SUMMARY

This study takes a different approach from previous studies. It looks beyond what makes the single parent "tick." It bypasses the issue of whether single parents should be allowed to enter the Air Force and deals with the reality of today. Single parents are here and will continue to be here in increasing numbers (6:58). Therefore, instead of debating the pros and cons of single parents in the military or dissecting the psychological motivations of single parents, this study will try to resolve the primary reason single parents have unique problems with military commitments. That reason is child care (27:2). Single parents are different than single airmen because they have children. Single parents are different than married airmen because they do not have a spouse to care for the children during mobility. Therefore, if the child care problem is solved, single parents are no more of a problem than other airmen. In short, the problem is child care, not single parents.

Child care problems grow as the single parent population grows. This study will look at why the single parent population is growing and what the Air Force is doing to remedy the

problem. Finally it will analyze these efforts and offer recommendations to resolve the single parent child care problem. The intent is to find child care options so the single parent can meet mobility commitments. The ultimate objective is to improve Air Force readiness.

Chapter Two

BACKGROUND STATISTICS AND INFORMATION

"Two of anything but children make a pair.
Two of them make a mob."

Reflections of a Bachelor

Statistics

The numbers keep growing. Both the number of children living with single parents and the number of single parents are rapidly increasing in society. Three in five children born today will live with a single parent before they are 18 years old (6:58). There are almost two million more single parents in the United States today than there were ten years ago (7:B1). These growing trends affect society's family composition and its work force..

The single parent explosion also affects the Air Force family and work force composition. Today the Air Force has about 8,500 single parents with about 11,500 children under 18 years old. Thirty-five percent of these children are under six years old and have critical child care needs. Single parents comprise about 1.5 percent of the total Air Force manpower (17:11). This is a growth of nearly 50 percent since 1980 (26:3).

This rapid growth is alarming for Air Force leaders looking at future demographic trends. As the number of Air Force single parents grows, concern for their impact on mobility also grows (29:15). Demographic trends show the numbers of single parents will rise throughout this century (7:B1). This means the manpower pool available to Air Force recruiters will contain a larger percentage of single parents. This fact, combined with the shrinking number of eighteen year olds the country will have in the next two decades, indicates the numbers of single parents in the Air Force will increase (28:20).

Past Studies

As numbers of single parents increase, associated child care needs could also increase. Studies of today's Air Force single parent child care problems could indicate if trends will lead to unacceptable conditions. One recent single parent study concluded that " . . . concerns about today's single parents in the Air Force appear to be largely unfounded (16:1)." Other

studies support this view that single parent child care needs are not a significant problem. They point out that single parents are highly committed to the Air Force mission and are more aware of job security because of their parental responsibilities (24:7-9). Further supporting this view, a recent interview of Air Force single parents showed 83 percent claiming they had no child care problems (25:7).

On the opposing view, the remaining 17 percent who did admit to having child care problems account for about 2000 children and 1500 airmen (17:11). In a national emergency, 1500 airmen not able to perform mobility duties could be quite significant. Additionally, even if they did report to work, 2000 children not adequately cared for appears to be an unacceptable situation. Another study recently found a more negative trend concerning single parent availability for mobility. It concluded that Air Force single parents are as much as 25 percent less likely to respond quickly to a mobility requirement than other personnel (21:14). These findings appear to directly conflict with the findings in the previous paragraph.

With such diverse findings in parallel studies, it is difficult to evaluate the real impact of single parents on mobility responsiveness. Nevertheless, the validity of this study does not hinge on the accuracy of knowing how responsive single parents will be for mobility. Anything the Air Force can do to reduce child care conflicts for the single parent will help the single parent meet mission needs and ultimately improve Air Force readiness.

Meeting family needs is part of meeting mission needs according to AFR 36-20 (13:4). The Air Force recognizes the unique demands of military life. Its mobility requirements put a unique strain on the single parent (27:39). Therefore, it does not appear unreasonable for the Air Force to provide assistance in helping the single parent find suitable child care arrangements. The statistical evidence of increasing numbers of Air Force single parents adds urgency to the need to find more suitable child care options. This supports the Air Force policy of meeting family needs without compromising mission needs.

The Air Force is showing little compromise in another issue that could significantly affect the statistics on single parents. The issue is initial enlistment of single parents into the Air Force. Although not critical to the validity of this study, a brief background on current enlistment policies and conflicts is appropriate.

Single Parent Enlistment

Air Force policy today prohibits enlisting single parents. It does not allow recruiters to enlist anyone who has a dependent eighteen years or younger. The same restrictions apply to prospective recruits that pay child support (10:3). This ban does not prohibit reenlistment of airmen who become single parents after entering the Air Force through divorce, pregnancy, or death. The ban also applies to Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve recruits. However, a congressional bill this year will propose allowing entry of single parents into the reserves if they are coming out of active duty (8:24).

Air Force officials caution that this proposal will not lead to an easing of their willingness to accept newly enlisted single parents. One spokesman stated, "We are already concerned about whether joint service couples have adequate arrangements for their children in a crisis. We don't need the additional headache of worrying about what to do with the children of a whole new group of young single parents if we go to war (8:24)."

A new group of young single parents do not agree with the Air Force policy and have taken the Air Force to court. Their suit claims the policy is irrational and not in the best interest of the Air Force, the single parent, or the children. It contends that requiring the parent give up custody of a child before becoming eligible for enlistment is absurd. One plaintiff stated, "Its inappropriate for a woman to make the choice between giving up legal custody of her child or serving in the armed forces (9:2)."

The federal court recently ruled that it was not an inappropriate choice. It upheld the right of the military to ban single parents from entry into the service (9:2). The plaintiffs are appealing the decision to the Supreme Court.

If the Supreme Court reverses the decision there may be more single parents in the service. If they uphold the decision the numbers of single parents will still increase for reasons already discussed. Either way, the necessity to explore child care options for single parents is justified. Regardless of future changes in single parent enlistment policies, reliable child care options for single parents will enhance Air Force readiness.

Chapter Three

AIR FORCE PROGRAMS THAT HANDLE CHILD CARE FOR SINGLE PARENTS

"Before I got married I had four theories for handling children.
Now I have four children and no theories!"

Lord Rochester, 1680

FOUR PRIMARY PROGRAMS

As the numbers of single parents grow, the Air Force is responding with programs to handle the child care needs. Four primary programs to handle the needs are the **Dependent Care Responsibilities Regulation**, The **Dependent Care Certification Program**, expanded child care center operations, and the **Family Support Center Program** (12:1; 15:1; 17:1; 18:1; 19:1; 20:1; 30; 31). These programs all have new initiatives that support the single parent's child care needs.

AFR 35-59, Dependent Care Responsibilities

AFR 35-59 lays the foundation for what is expected of all Air Force personnel to ensure that dependent responsibilities do not jeopardize accomplishment of military duties. It requires that "All members must be available for the full scope of military duties . . . (12:2)." This includes short-notice or no-notice deployment, alert, recalls, extended duty hours, shift work, and related military commitments. The regulation further states that " . . . each Air Force member must make and maintain dependent care arrangements which will allow him or her to be worldwide available at all times (12:2)." This portion of the regulation offers no special treatment for single parents.

Another portion of the regulation does specifically address the single parent. The regulation recognizes that single parents have unique family problems because no spouse can care for the children when short-notice commitments occur. Therefore the single parents must be counseled about their duties. They must be reminded of their military obligations before extension or reenlistment is approved. They must also be counseled at each new duty station and before assignment to a dependent restricted area (12:3). A female single airman must be counseled when she becomes pregnant. Finally, every October all single

parents must receive annual counseling to remind them of their military obligation. The regulation emphasizes through counseling that parental responsibilities will not excuse a single parent from military duties (12:1-4).

The regulation also reminds commanders that special treatment should not be given to single parents. "Inequitable or inconsistent scheduling to accommodate dependent care arrangements can be counterproductive and disruptive to unit morale (12:4)." It tries to reduce special treatment by establishing a method for the commander to ensure the single parent has adequate child care arrangements. It requires the parents to verify that dependents are cared for in the event of military duties such as mobility. This verification is made on a Dependent Care Certification Form.

Dependent Care Certification Program, AF Form 357

The Dependent Care Certification Program requires the single parent designate a person to care for his/her children when military duties take the parent away from home. The form must be filled out within 60 days of arrival at a new base. Parents must also update it annually every October (12:4).

Supervisors monitor that the forms are updated. They are encouraged, but not required, to verify the validity of the form by contacting the designated care giver. This can be done through telephone confirmation, letter, or face-to-face conversation (12:4). The AF Form 357 is the one concrete piece of evidence that the single parents will not have child care problems interfering with their military mobility.

A single parent who fails to properly complete AF Form 357 and cannot meet worldwide military obligations may be punished under the UCMJ. Failure to comply can also be a basis for parenthood separation or removal from the Air Force (12:4). The commanders and supervisors are cautioned from "carrying" individuals who do not have adequate child care arrangements made on AF Form 357 (12:5).

The Dependent Care Certification Program does not provide child care for the single parents. It establishes the requirement for single parents to obtain child care. It is designed to provide commanders and single parents with the security of knowing that child care arrangements are made before a crisis develops. It is designed to protect the single parent and the needs of the Air Force (12:1; 31). Actual child care

arrangements are made at the discretion of the single parent. One of the most obvious starting points for child care help is the Air Force base child care center (34).

Air Force Child Care Centers

Air Force child care centers fall under the jurisdiction of the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation program. The objective of the centers is to offer safe, well-staffed, and well-equipped child development programs for children using the centers (15:3). Most centers provide a preschool program, a before- and after-school program, infant and toddler care, drop-in care, daily care, and partial night care (15:3, 31).

AFR 215-27 states that child care center programs improve the overall quality of life for Air Force families and improve Air Force readiness. It states that quality child care programs let the parent be secure that his/her children are well cared for while he/she accomplishes the Air Force mission (15:3).

However, a single parent looking at the Air Force child care center to help him/her meet mobility obligations may be disappointed. Air Force child care centers normally do not stay open twenty-four hours. The Air Force tried a test program last year with some child care centers remaining open all night. The program has been discontinued (32,34,35).

One Air Force child care center program that has not been discontinued is the Family Day Care Program. The purpose of the program is to provide flexible child care in a licensed and qualified home environment (31). A child care center staff member visits homes of those desiring to provide day care in the community. The staff conducts safety inspections, provides training, and licenses those who qualify (31,34,35). The child care center then puts these homes on a referral list.

Single parents looking for flexible child care arrangements can get family day care information from the child care center. It is still the responsibility of the single parent to make an arrangement with the day care home for short-notice or no-notice child care during mobility. If an agreement cannot be reached, there is another agency on base that might help the single parent find suitable child care. That new agency is the Air Force Family Support Center.

Air Force Family Support Centers

A recently implemented Air Force program that can help single parents and their child care needs is the base family support center (31,33). One family support center function is to act as a conduit for civilian support agencies in the community (17:1). If a single parent requests assistance in child care, the family support center can contact local community child care and foster care organizations (30).

The single parent can examine the options offered by the community child and foster care programs. The family support center does not make contracts with the community child care organizations. It can only act as a referral service. It is still the responsibility of the single parent to make arrangements with civilian agencies (30).

If the single parent arranges to send his children far away from the local area during mobility, the family support center can again help with information on financial assistance. AFR 211-1, Air Force Assistance, may provide money for dependent travel in some situations (14:1). Family support centers stress that child care assistance and financial help is most successful with advance planning (30).

ANALYSIS OF THE FOUR PROGRAMS

AFR 35-59, Dependent Care Responsibilities

The regulation appears to cover necessary areas to ensure Air Force needs are met. The regulation clearly states what is expected of Air Force single parents (12:1 - 4). It provides counsel be given to single parents so they are aware of their priorities and obligations. Finally it provides for punishment for offenders.

Unfortunately, punishing an offender does not make him/her available for mobility. Actual compliance with the regulation is still a problem. One inspection report found almost 25 percent of single parents in violation of the regulation in one way or another (19:1). Another inspection found commanders and supervisors did not take an active role in enforcing the regulation (20:12). Still other supervisors were found to be "carrying" single parents who had no suitable child care arrangements (20:12).

Inspections show significant violations of AFR 35-59. Yet judicial punishment is rare (19:1). This indicates

commanders and supervisors are not placing adequate emphasis on the importance of the regulation. Similar problems with the reliability of the Dependent Care Certification Form 357 appear to support this assertion.

AF Form 357, Dependent Care Certification

Inspections of the Dependent Care Certification Program show some significant problems. These problems show lack of concern for the relevance of the program. One specific problem is "pencil whipping" of the form. Evidently some parents never thought they would really have to mobilize (19:1). This indicates a lack of credibility in the program.

Another indication of lack of credibility in the program comes from an inspection that showed 23 percent of single parents had invalid dependent care certifications. Even though these airmen are liable for punishment, their ability to meet the needs of the Air Force is still questionable (29:15).

Meeting the needs of the program is not always simple for the single parent. Take an example of a single parent arriving at a new base. Studies show that Air Force single parents are not likely to live near immediate family or a former spouse (26:3). The single parent has a deadline to find suitable child care arrangements. If a suitable family is found to provide care the form can be filled out easily. However, that family may PCS in a few months and the form becomes invalid. Without emphasis on the program from supervisors that single parent may not even think about the discrepancy.

In a second scenario, the single parent may not quickly find a suitable child care arrangement. Without proper emphasis from supervisors on the importance of the program, the parent may make a hasty unrealistic arrangement to simply "fill the square."

Evidence indicates commanders and supervisors are not emphasizing the importance of the program enough to prevent some single parents from "filling the square." Enforcement from the top is required to establish credibility for the program (31,33).

Air Force Child Care Centers

The on-base Air Force child care centers do not solve the problem of a single parent going on mobility. It does not appear that they will in the future either. The Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Directorate is now requiring most

child care centers to break even financially. This is because of the large cuts in MWR funds the last two years (31,32,34). The significance of this is that child care centers will be open only during those times when there is enough business to pay for operating costs (31). This means child care center hours may become even shorter. This makes the centers less of an option for single parents looking for child care during mobility.

Child care experts quickly point out that child care centers are not designed to keep children for long stays like a mobility may require. The centers are not staffed to run twenty-four hours. They are also not equipped to keep a child for several days at a time (31,32,33,34,35). One child advocate points out that living in a child care center for an indefinite period of time would be harmful to the child (33).

A child care center operation that appears to be a good environment for the child is a family day care home. This program puts the child in a healthy home environment where he can live for an indefinite time. This program appears to provide a good environment for the child and a flexible arrangement for the single parent should military mobility occur. While the program was not created specifically for the single parent, it provides a rich source of contacts for single parents looking for qualified people willing to care for their children on a flexible and short-notice basis (31,34).

Although family day care looks promising for single parents' child care needs, it is not without problems. Today, only about half the Air Force bases have a family day care program (34). One of the reasons is purely financial. Additional personnel authorizations have not been funded for some bases (32,34). However, some of the bases could already implement the program with more support from base commanders. Some commanders are not willing to spend extra funds for a program they do not view as a high enough priority (31).

By 1991, funds should be appropriated to allow all base commanders to implement the family day care program (34). Until then, single parents will have to check with the child care center on their particular base to determine if family day care is available. Once all bases implement the program many single parents will have a very handy source to help solve their child care needs during mobility.

The family day care operation is particularly suited to single parent mobility needs because the homes are primarily

those of military families. Therefore they are more understanding and sensitive to the unique military demands placed on a single parent (31). Getting a military spouse to agree to answer a knock at the door at two o'clock in the morning and accept a child because of a mobility requirement may be easier because of that sensitivity.

That same sensitivity brings up the possibility of an expanded family day care program especially designed for single parents caught without acceptable child care plans during a mobility. Child care centers could solicit family day care homes to agree to take care of any single parent's child in the event of mobility. This pool of volunteers could be contacted periodically to update their willingness to participate in the program. During mobility those single parents with no child care arrangements could bring their children to a designated collection point (such as the child care center), sign a power of attorney, and know the child would be placed in a licensed day care home sometime that day. Air Force child care specialists are quick to point out that this proposal has several pitfalls (31). Signing a power of attorney for an unknown caregiver is questionable. Even getting a lawyer to the collection point to verify the powers of attorney is questionable. Air Force child care centers are not staffed to handle this program (15:8). Finally, neither the parent nor the child would know the family the child stays with. However, the proposal would not cost very much to implement and would provide a "last ditch" measure to enable an unprepared single parent to report for mobility.

Family day care indeed appears to be a promising solution for many single parents. It allows the Air Force to take care of its own. The flexibility, sensitivity, and worldwide application of the program appear to fill many single parent child care needs. For those single parents who do not find satisfaction with this program, there is still the family support center.

Family Support Center

Many Air Force child care advocates believe the family support center is the least desirable alternative for single parent child care (31, 34). They point out that most civilian agencies will not be responsive and flexible enough to meet the demands of a military mobility at any time of day or night. They also point out that the child is not likely to have established ties with a foster family or child care agency that is only used for real mobility situations. On the other hand they emphasize that a child is more likely to have already established ties with a day care family that is used regularly.

Family support centers could also establish a program that is especially geared for the single parent caught unprepared during mobility. They could keep a listing of volunteer foster parents in the community that are willing to care for a child during military mobility. The family support center could periodically update this listing. Unprepared single parents could then bring their children to a designated collection point such as the child care center or family support center when mobility is declared. They would sign a power of attorney and know their child would be placed with a foster family in the local community. This program has similar advantages and disadvantages as those mentioned for the family day care proposal. Once again, in spite of the hurdles that need to be overcome, this proposal does provide an immediate solution for the single parent faced with a no-notice mobility and no suitable alternative.

The family support center does appear to offer some help and has the potential to offer more. Presently the program only offers child care referral service. The degree of success the single parent has using this service depends on how diligently he/she seeks out suitable agencies.

Chapter Four

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

"I have found the best way to give advice to your children is to find out what they want and then advise them to do it."

Harry Truman, May 27, 1955

FINDINGS

This study offers the following findings:

- a. AFR 35-59, Dependent Care Responsibilities, is an adequate regulation. Enforcement of the regulation is not adequate. As a result, Air Force readiness suffers.
- b. Air Force Form 357, Dependent Care Certification, is not given adequate emphasis by commanders and supervisors. The data on the form is too often invalid. As a result, Air Force readiness suffers.
- c. Air Force base child care centers are not suitable to provide child care for single parents during mobility.
- d. Air Force child care center family day care programs are very suitable for many single parent child care needs during mobility.
- e. Air Force base family support centers can provide helpful child care information for single parents looking at civilian community agencies. The program requires advance planning and diligent searching by the single parent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study offers the following recommendations:

- a. Commanders and supervisors should emphasize stronger enforcement of AFR 35-59, Dependent Care Responsibilities. This enforcement should include judicial and nonjudicial punishment for violators. The current lack of enforcement sends mixed signals to single parents and supervisors about the sincerity of the program. Stronger enforcement will encourage single parents to make suitable child care arrangements.

It will also highlight the problem to commanders and supervisors and thereby bring more attention and support to the program. This increased awareness by commanders and supervisors may be the most important result of increased enforcement.

b. Commanders and supervisors should increase participation in the Dependent Care Certification Program. Supervisors should verbally confirm every certification through direct contact with the designated care giver. The supervisor should confirm monthly with the single parent that arrangements are still valid. He should also reconfirm quarterly with the designated care giver to ensure continued availability.

c. Air Force child care centers should aggressively support recommendations a and b by participating in a campaign to increase emphasis on dependent care responsibilities. Since single parents often use the child care center for routine child care, the centers are good places to post reminders that single parents should make suitable child care arrangements in the event they mobilize.

d. Air Force child care centers should aggressively promote and advertise the virtues of family day care for single parents needing flexible child care.

e. All bases should implement family day care programs as soon as possible. The programs can be instrumental in improving Air Force readiness.

f. Air Force child care centers should investigate the feasibility of having a pool of family day care volunteers for emergency child care of children whose parents go on mobility and have no child care arranged. Disciplinary action for the parent should be considered after the crisis is over.

g. Family support centers should continue to build their referral services for child care in the local community.

h. Family support centers should investigate the feasibility of having a pool of community foster parents for emergency child care of children whose parents go on mobility and have no child care arranged. Disciplinary action for the parent should be considered after the crisis is over.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to improve Air Force readiness. The method was by finding suitable child care arrangements that allow single parents to mobilize. Two findings of the study showed a weakness in Air Force readiness. These findings were lack of enforcement of the Dependent Care Regulation and lack of supervisor involvement in the Dependent Certification Program. This study gives recommendations to improve those two areas. If these recommendations are implemented, Air Force readiness should improve. Then the study will have accomplished its objective.

Implementing recommendations often requires more than good intentions. It often requires money. One assumption in this study was that excessive funds could not be used to provide dedicated child care for the small portion of single parents in the Air Force. The eight recommendations of this study can all be implemented at the base level for very little cost. Staffing for the family day care program and the proposed expanded family support center referral service appears to be the most expensive hurdle. Fortunately the family day care center staffing is already budgeted. The remaining recommendations require very minor funding and are easy to implement.

The Air Force has invested a considerable amount of money in training its 8,500 single parents. All indications are that it will have more single parents trained in the future. This study's recommendations provide assistance to the single parent so he/she can contribute more for the Air Force. The recommendations do not show preferential treatment nor leniency to single parents. They do not require large sums of money for a special interest group that takes money away from more service-wide personnel programs. The recommendations continue to place the burden of child care responsibilities on the single parent. They do use established Air Force organizations to provide counseling and guidance on where to find qualified child care. They do focus on improving Air Force readiness.

If the recommendations are implemented, the improvement in Air Force readiness could be significant. If implemented, the recommendations should benefit all three major players in this study; the Air Force, the single parent, and the child.

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